

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

JOSEPH C. MALFATONE,

Plaintiff,

-against-

MESSIAH NEAL; ORANGE COUNTY
JAIL,

Defendants.

24-CV-2131 (LTS)

ORDER TO AMEND

LAURA TAYLOR SWAIN, Chief United States District Judge:

Plaintiff, who currently is in pretrial detention in the Orange County Jail, brings this action, *pro se*, under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, alleging that Defendants violated his rights. By order dated April 15, 2024, the Court granted Plaintiff's request to proceed *in forma pauperis* ("IFP"), that is, without prepayment of fees.¹ For the reasons set forth below, the Court grants Plaintiff leave to file an amended complaint within 60 days of the date of this order.

STANDARD OF REVIEW

The Prison Litigation Reform Act requires that federal courts screen complaints brought by prisoners who seek relief against a governmental entity or an officer or employee of a governmental entity. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(a). The Court must dismiss a prisoner's complaint, or any portion of the complaint, that is frivolous or malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b); *see Abbas v. Dixon*, 480 F.3d 636, 639 (2d Cir. 2007). The Court

¹ Prisoners are not exempt from paying the full filing fee even when they have been granted permission to proceed IFP. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1).

must also dismiss a complaint if the Court lacks subject matter jurisdiction. *See Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(h)(3).*

While the law mandates dismissal on any of these grounds, the Court is obliged to construe *pro se* pleadings liberally, *Harris v. Mills*, 572 F.3d 66, 72 (2d Cir. 2009), and interpret them to raise the “strongest [claims] that they suggest,” *Triestman v. Fed. Bureau of Prisons*, 470 F.3d 471, 474 (2d Cir. 2006) (internal quotation marks and citations omitted) (emphasis in original). But the “special solicitude” in *pro se* cases, *id.* at 475 (citation omitted), has its limits – to state a claim, *pro se* pleadings still must comply with Rule 8 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, which requires a complaint to make a short and plain statement showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.

Rule 8 requires a complaint to include enough facts to state a claim for relief “that is plausible on its face.” *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007). A claim is facially plausible if the plaintiff pleads enough factual detail to allow the Court to draw the inference that the defendant is liable for the alleged misconduct. In reviewing the complaint, the Court must accept all well-pleaded factual allegations as true. *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678-79 (2009). But it does not have to accept as true “[t]hreadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action,” which are essentially just legal conclusions. *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 555. After separating legal conclusions from well-pleaded factual allegations, the Court must determine whether those facts make it plausible – not merely possible – that the pleader is entitled to relief. *Id.*

BACKGROUND

The complaint, which names as defendants the Orange County Jail (“OCJ”) and a transgender detainee named Messiah Neal, sets forth the following facts regarding events allegedly occurring in the OCJ on March 9, 2024, and March 13, 2024. Neal allegedly spit into the “unit hot pot” where the other detainees get their water and then placed in it dirty socks,

trash, and lead paint. (ECF 1 ¶ IV.) Plaintiff alleges that as a result of Neal’s actions, he and other detainees experienced nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. Plaintiff “received stomach medication” and “blood work to make sure [he] didn’t have anything.” (*Id.*) Plaintiff “complained” to the administration time and again,” apparently about Neal’s behavior, and he is “seeking new asylum for [Neal]” and money damages. (*Id.* ¶¶ V, VI.)

DISCUSSION

A. The named defendants

1. Messiah Neal

To state a claim under 42 U.S.C. Section § 1983, a plaintiff must allege both that: (1) a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States was violated, and (2) the right was violated by a person acting under the color of state law, or a “state actor.” *West v. Atkins*, 487 U.S. 42, 48-49 (1988). In other words, a claim for relief under Section 1983 must allege facts showing that each defendant acted under the color of a state “statute, ordinance, regulation, custom or usage.” 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Private parties therefore generally are not liable under the statute. *Sykes v. Bank of Am.*, 723 F.3d 399, 406 (2d Cir. 2013) (citing *Brentwood Acad. v. Tenn. Secondary Sch. Athletic Ass’n*, 531 U.S. 288, 295 (2001)); *see also Ciambriello v. Cnty. of Nassau*, 292 F.3d 307, 323 (2d Cir. 2002) (“[T]he United States Constitution regulates only the Government, not private parties.”). As Defendant Messiah Neal, who is a detainee, is a private party who is not alleged to work for any state or other government body, Plaintiff has not stated a claim against this defendant under Section 1983.²

² A federal district court may decline to exercise supplemental jurisdiction of state-law claims when it “has dismissed all claims over which it has original jurisdiction.” 28 U.S.C. § 1337(c)(3). Generally, “when the federal-law claims have dropped out of the lawsuit in its early stages and only state-law claims remain, the federal court should decline the exercise of jurisdiction.” *Carnegie-Mellon Univ. v. Cohill*, 484 U.S. 343, 350 (1988) (footnote omitted). Because the Court is granting Plaintiff leave to replead his federal claims, the Court declines to

2. Orange County Jail (OCJ)

Plaintiff's claims against the OCJ must be dismissed because city or county agencies, departments or facilities do not have the capacity to be sued under New York law.³ See *Omnipoint Commc'ns, Inc. v. Town of LaGrange*, 658 F. Supp. 2d 539, 552 (S.D.N.Y. 2009) ("In New York, agencies of a municipality are not suable entities."); *Hall v. City of White Plains*, 185 F. Supp. 2d 293, 303 (S.D.N.Y. 2002) ("Under New York law, departments which are merely administrative arms of a municipality do not have a legal identity separate and apart from the municipality and cannot sue or be sued."); *see also* N.Y. Gen. Mun. Law § 2 ("The term 'municipal corporation,' as used in this chapter, includes only a county, town, city and village.").

Because it may be Plaintiff's intention to sue Orange County, the Court construes the complaint as asserting a claim against Orange County. When a plaintiff sues a municipality under Section 1983, it is not enough for the plaintiff to allege that one of the municipality's employees or agents engaged in some wrongdoing. The plaintiff must show that the municipality itself caused the violation of the plaintiff's rights. *See Connick v. Thompson*, 563 U.S. 51, 60 (2011) ("A municipality or other local government may be liable under . . . section [1983] if the governmental body itself 'subjects' a person to a deprivation of rights or 'causes' a person 'to be

address the merits of any state law claims that Plaintiff may wish to assert against this Defendant. *See Kolari v. New York-Presbyterian Hosp.*, 455 F.3d 118, 122 (2d Cir. 2006) ("Subsection (c) of § 1367 'confirms the discretionary nature of supplemental jurisdiction by enumerating the circumstances in which district courts can refuse its exercise.'" (quoting *City of Chicago v. Int'l Coll. of Surgeons*, 522 U.S. 156, 173 (1997))). The Court will determine at a later stage whether to exercise its supplemental jurisdiction over any state law claims.

³ Section 1983 also provides that an action may be maintained against a "person" who has deprived another of rights under the "Constitution and Laws." 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Here, the OCJ, which is a facility, is not a "person" within the meaning of Section 1983. *See Will v. Mich. Dep't of State Police*, 491 U.S. 58 (1989) (holding that a state agency is not a "person" for the purpose of § 1983 liability); *Whitley v. Westchester Cnty. Corr. Fac. Admin.*, No. 97-CV-420 (SS), 1997 WL 659100, at *7 (S.D.N.Y. Oct. 22, 1997) (noting that a correctional facility or jail is not a "person" within the meaning of Section 1983).

subjected' to such deprivation." (quoting *Monell v. Dep't of Soc. Servs.*, 436 U.S. 658, 692 (1978)); *Cash v. Cnty. of Erie*, 654 F.3d 324, 333 (2d Cir. 2011). In other words, to state a Section 1983 claim against a municipality, the plaintiff must allege facts showing (1) the existence of a municipal policy, custom, or practice, and (2) that the policy, custom, or practice caused the violation of the plaintiff's constitutional rights. *See Jones v. Town of East Haven*, 691 F.3d 72, 80 (2d Cir. 2012); *Bd. of Cnty. Comm'r's v. Brown*, 520 U.S. 397, 403 (1997) (internal citations omitted).

A plaintiff may satisfy the policy or custom requirement by alleging one of the following: "(1) a formal policy officially endorsed by the municipality; (2) actions taken by government officials responsible for establishing the municipal policies that caused the particular deprivation in question; (3) a practice so consistent and widespread that, although not expressly authorized, constitutes a custom or usage of which a supervising policy-maker must have been aware; or (4) a failure by policymakers to provide adequate training or supervision to subordinates to such an extent that it amounts to deliberate indifference to the rights of those who come into contact with the municipal employees." *Brandon v. City of New York*, 705 F. Supp. 2d 261, 276-77 (S.D.N.Y. 2010) (citations omitted).

Plaintiff's complaint does not set forth facts suggesting that a municipal policy, custom, or practice contributed to the violation of his constitutional rights. If Plaintiff seeks to assert claims against Orange County, he should name Orange County as a defendant, and allege facts showing that a municipal policy, custom, or practice contributed to a violation of his constitutional rights.

B. Failure to protect claim

A plaintiff proceeding under Section 1983 must allege facts showing the defendants' direct and personal involvement in the alleged constitutional deprivation. *See Spavone v. N.Y.*

State Dep’t of Corr. Serv., 719 F.3d 127, 135 (2d Cir. 2013) (“It is well settled in this Circuit that personal involvement of defendants in the alleged constitutional deprivations is a prerequisite to an award of damages under § 1983.” (internal quotation marks omitted)). A defendant may not be held liable under Section 1983 solely because that defendant employs or supervises a person who violated the plaintiff’s rights. *See Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 676 (2009) (“Government officials may not be held liable for the unconstitutional conduct of their subordinates under a theory of respondeat superior.”). Rather, “[t]o hold a state official liable under § 1983, a plaintiff must plead and prove the elements of the underlying constitutional violation directly against the official[.]” *Tangreti v. Bachmann*, 983 F.3d 609, 620 (2d Cir. 2020).

The Court construes Plaintiff’s allegations as a failure to protect claim under the Fourteenth Amendment. Prison officials are required to take reasonable measures to guarantee the safety of prisoners, including protecting them from harm caused by other prisoners. *See Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 832-33 (1994); *Fischl v. Armitage*, 128 F.3d 50, 55 (2d Cir. 1997). A pretrial detainee asserting a failure to protect claim under the Fourteenth Amendment’s Due Process Clause must plead two elements: (1) an “objective” element, which requires a showing that the risk of harm is sufficiently serious, and (2) a “mental” element, which requires a showing that the officer knew or should have known of the risk of serious harm but acted with deliberate indifference to that risk. *Darnell v. Pineiro*, 849 F.3d 17, 29 (2d Cir. 2017); *Walker v. Schult*, 717 F.3d 119, 125 (2d Cir. 2013) (“Evidence that a risk was obvious or otherwise must have been known to a defendant may be sufficient for a fact finder to conclude that the defendant was actually aware of the risk.” (quotation marks omitted)). The mere negligence of a correctional official is not a basis for a claim of a federal constitutional violation under Section 1983. *See Daniels v. Williams*, 474 U.S. 327, 335-36 (1986); *Davidson v. Cannon*, 474

U.S. 344, 348 (1986); *Morales v. New York State Dep't of Corr.*, 842 F.2d 27 (2d Cir. 1988) ("[A] prisoner cannot base a federal civil rights action brought under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 on claims of a negligent failure of state prison officials to protect him from injury at the hands of another inmate[.]").

Here, Plaintiff does not allege sufficient facts to state a failure to protect claim. He alleges that, on two occasions, another detainee corrupted the water source, which caused Plaintiff to get sick, and that he complained to the "administration" about these incidents. He does not name as a defendant any individual correction officer or other official who was personally involved in violating his rights. Nor does he allege any specific facts to support his contention that a correction officer or official knew or was in a position to know that Neal was going to engage in that conduct, and was in a position to prevent it before it happened and failed to do so.

The Court grants Plaintiff leave to amend his complaint to name any individual defendants who were personally involved in violated his rights, and to allege additional facts to state a viable failure to protect claim under Section 1983.

LEAVE TO AMEND

Plaintiff proceeds in this matter without the benefit of an attorney. District courts generally should grant a self-represented plaintiff an opportunity to amend a complaint to cure its defects, unless amendment would be futile. *See Hill v. Curcione*, 657 F.3d 116, 123-24 (2d Cir. 2011); *Salahuddin v. Cuomo*, 861 F.2d 40, 42 (2d Cir. 1988). Indeed, the Second Circuit has cautioned that district courts "should not dismiss [a *pro se* complaint] without granting leave to amend at least once when a liberal reading of the complaint gives any indication that a valid claim might be stated." *Cuoco v. Moritsugu*, 222 F.3d 99, 112 (2d Cir. 2000) (quoting *Gomez v. USAA Fed. Sav. Bank*, 171 F.3d 794, 795 (2d Cir. 1999)). Because Plaintiff may be able to allege

additional facts to state a valid Section 1983 claim, the Court grants Plaintiff 60 days' leave to amend his complaint to detail his claims.

Plaintiff is granted leave to amend his complaint to provide more facts about his claims. First, Plaintiff must name as the defendant(s) in the caption⁴ and in the statement of claim those individuals who were allegedly involved in the deprivation of his federal rights. If Plaintiff does not know the name of a defendant, he may refer to that individual as "John Doe" or "Jane Doe" in both the caption and the body of the amended complaint.⁵ The naming of John Doe defendants, however, does *not* toll the three-year statute of limitations period governing this action and Plaintiff shall be responsible for ascertaining the true identity of any "John Doe" defendants and amending his complaint to include the identity of any "John Doe" defendants before the statute of limitations period expires. Should Plaintiff seek to add a new claim or party after the statute of limitations period has expired, he must meet the requirements of Rule 15(c) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. In the "Statement of Claim" section of the amended complaint form, Plaintiff must provide a short and plain statement of the relevant facts supporting each claim against each defendant. If Plaintiff has an address for any named defendant, Plaintiff must provide it. Plaintiff should include all of the information in the amended complaint that Plaintiff wants the Court to consider in deciding whether the amended complaint states a claim for relief. That information should include:

- a) the names and titles of all relevant people;

⁴ The caption is located on the front page of the complaint. Each individual defendant must be named in the caption. Plaintiff may attach additional pages if there is not enough space to list all of the defendants in the caption. If Plaintiff needs to attach an additional page to list all defendants, he should write "see attached list" on the first page of the amended complaint. Any defendants named in the caption must also be discussed in Plaintiff's statement of claim.

⁵ For example, a defendant may be identified as: "Correction Officer John Doe #1 on duty August 31, 2023, at Sullivan Correctional Facility, during the 7-3 p.m. shift."

- b) a description of all relevant events, including what each defendant did or failed to do, the approximate date and time of each event, and the general location where each event occurred;
- c) a description of the injuries Plaintiff suffered; and
- d) the relief Plaintiff seeks, such as money damages, injunctive relief, or declaratory relief.

Essentially, Plaintiff's amended complaint should tell the Court: who violated his federally protected rights and how; when and where such violations occurred; and why Plaintiff is entitled to relief.

Because Plaintiff's amended complaint will completely replace, not supplement, the original complaint, any facts or claims that Plaintiff wants to include from the original complaint must be repeated in the amended complaint.

CONCLUSION

The Court dismisses the claims against the Orange County Jail, and the Clerk of Court is directed to terminate the Orange County Jail as a defendant. Plaintiff is granted leave to file an amended complaint that complies with the standards set forth above. Plaintiff must submit the amended complaint to this Court's Pro Se Intake Unit within 60 days of the date of this order, caption the document as an "Amended Complaint," and label the document with docket number 24-CV-2122 (LTS). An Amended Civil Rights Complaint form is attached to this order. No summons will issue at this time. If Plaintiff fails to comply within the time allowed, and he cannot show good cause to excuse such failure, the complaint will be dismissed for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted.

The Court certifies under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3) that any appeal from this order would not be taken in good faith, and therefore IFP status is denied for the purpose of an appeal. *Cf. Coppededge v. United States*, 369 U.S. 438, 444-45 (1962) (holding that an appellant demonstrates good faith when he seeks review of a nonfrivolous issue).

SO ORDERED.

Dated: August 19, 2024
New York, New York

/s/ Laura Taylor Swain

LAURA TAYLOR SWAIN
Chief United States District Judge

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

(In the space above enter the full name(s) of the plaintiff(s).)

-against-

**AMENDED
COMPLAINT**

under the Civil Rights Act,
42 U.S.C. § 1983

Jury Trial: Yes No
(check one)

____ Civ. ____ ()

(In the space above enter the full name(s) of the defendant(s). If you cannot fit the names of all of the defendants in the space provided, please write "see attached" in the space above and attach an additional sheet of paper with the full list of names. The names listed in the above caption must be identical to those contained in Part I. Addresses should not be included here.)

I. Parties in this complaint:

- A. List your name, identification number, and the name and address of your current place of confinement. Do the same for any additional plaintiffs named. Attach additional sheets of paper as necessary.

Plaintiff's Name _____
ID# _____
Current Institution _____
Address _____

- B. List all defendants' names, positions, places of employment, and the address where each defendant may be served. Make sure that the defendant(s) listed below are identical to those contained in the above caption. Attach additional sheets of paper as necessary.

Defendant No. 1 Name _____ Shield # _____
Where Currently Employed _____
Address _____

Defendant No. 2 Name _____ Shield # _____
 Where Currently Employed _____
 Address _____

Defendant No. 3 Name _____ Shield # _____
 Where Currently Employed _____
 Address _____

Who did what?

Defendant No. 4 Name _____ Shield # _____
 Where Currently Employed _____
 Address _____

Defendant No. 5 Name _____ Shield # _____
 Where Currently Employed _____
 Address _____

II. Statement of Claim:

State as briefly as possible the facts of your case. Describe how each of the defendants named in the caption of this complaint is involved in this action, along with the dates and locations of all relevant events. You may wish to include further details such as the names of other persons involved in the events giving rise to your claims. Do not cite any cases or statutes. If you intend to allege a number of related claims, number and set forth each claim in a separate paragraph. Attach additional sheets of paper as necessary.

A. In what institution did the events giving rise to your claim(s) occur?

B. Where in the institution did the events giving rise to your claim(s) occur?

C. What date and approximate time did the events giving rise to your claim(s) occur?

D. Facts: _____

What happened to you?

**Was
anyone
else
involved?**

**Who else
saw what
happened?**

III. Injuries:

If you sustained injuries related to the events alleged above, describe them and state what medical treatment, if any, you required and received.

IV. Exhaustion of Administrative Remedies:

The Prison Litigation Reform Act ("PLRA"), 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(a), requires that "[n]o action shall be brought with respect to prison conditions under section 1983 of this title, or any other Federal law, by a prisoner confined in any jail, prison, or other correctional facility until such administrative remedies as are available are exhausted." Administrative remedies are also known as grievance procedures.

A. Did your claim(s) arise while you were confined in a jail, prison, or other correctional facility?

Yes No

If YES, name the jail, prison, or other correctional facility where you were confined at the time of the events giving rise to your claim(s).

B. Does the jail, prison or other correctional facility where your claim(s) arose have a grievance procedure?

Yes ____ No ____ Do Not Know ____

C. Does the grievance procedure at the jail, prison or other correctional facility where your claim(s) arose cover some or all of your claim(s)?

Yes ____ No ____ Do Not Know ____

If YES, which claim(s)?

D. Did you file a grievance in the jail, prison, or other correctional facility where your claim(s) arose?

Yes ____ No ____

If NO, did you file a grievance about the events described in this complaint at any other jail, prison, or other correctional facility?

Yes ____ No ____

E. If you did file a grievance, about the events described in this complaint, where did you file the grievance?

1. Which claim(s) in this complaint did you grieve?

2. What was the result, if any?

3. What steps, if any, did you take to appeal that decision? Describe all efforts to appeal to the highest level of the grievance process.

F. If you did not file a grievance:

1. If there are any reasons why you did not file a grievance, state them here:

2. If you did not file a grievance but informed any officials of your claim, state who you informed, when and how, and their response, if any:

- G. Please set forth any additional information that is relevant to the exhaustion of your administrative remedies.

Note: You may attach as exhibits to this complaint any documents related to the exhaustion of your administrative remedies.

V. Relief:

State what you want the Court to do for you (including the amount of monetary compensation, if any, that you are seeking and the basis for such amount). _____

VI. Previous lawsuits:

A. Have you filed other lawsuits in state or federal court dealing with the same facts involved in this action?

Yes _____ No _____

B. If your answer to A is YES, describe each lawsuit by answering questions 1 through 7 below. (If there is more than one lawsuit, describe the additional lawsuits on another sheet of paper, using the same format.)

1. Parties to the previous lawsuit:

Plaintiff

Defendants

2. Court (if federal court, name the district; if state court, name the county)

3. Docket or Index number

4. Name of Judge assigned to your case _____

5. Approximate date of filing lawsuit

6. Is the case still pending? Yes No

If NO, give the approximate date of disposition

7. What was the result of the case? (For example: Was the case dismissed? Was there judgment in your favor? Was the case appealed?)

C. Have you filed other lawsuits in state or federal court otherwise relating to your imprisonment?

Yes No

D. If your answer to C is YES, describe each lawsuit by answering questions 1 through 7 below. (If there is more than one lawsuit, describe the additional lawsuits on another piece of paper, using the same format.)

1. Parties to the previous lawsuit:

Plaintiff

Defendants

2. Court (if federal court, name the district; if state court, name the county)

3. Docket or Index number

4. Name of Judge assigned to your case

5. Approximate date of filing lawsuit

6. Is the case still pending? Yes ____ No ____
If NO, give the approximate date of disposition _____
7. What was the result of the case? (For example: Was the case dismissed? Was there judgment in your favor? Was the case appealed?) _____

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.

Signed this ____ day of _____, 20 ____.

Signature of Plaintiff _____

Inmate Number _____

Institution Address _____

Note: All plaintiffs named in the caption of the complaint must date and sign the complaint and provide their inmate numbers and addresses.

I declare under penalty of perjury that on this ____ day of _____, 20 ___, I am delivering this complaint to prison authorities to be mailed to the *Pro Se* Office of the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York.

Signature of Plaintiff: _____